

Claims

What is claimed is:

1. A portable electronic appliance comprising:
 - a portable electronic appliance having a housing, a data entry device and a display screen;
 - at least one second sensor disposed on a surface of the housing such that a user can make physical contact with the at least one second sensor; and
 - wherein the at least one second sensor provides contact data to a sensor circuit disposed within the portable electronic appliance, wherein the contact data in the sensor circuit is utilized by a processor within the portable electronic appliance to determine whether or not to activate or deactivate a predetermined function of the portable electronic appliance.
2. The portable electronic appliance as defined in claim 1 wherein the portable electronic appliance is selected from the group of portable electronic appliances comprised of a laptop computer, a mobile telephone, a personal digital assistant, a global positioning system, an electronic compass, a camera, a camcorder, and combination devices that include at least two of the functions above.

3. The portable electronic appliance as defined in claim 1 wherein the at least one second sensor is comprised of a capacitance sensitive touchpad.

4. The portable electronic appliance as defined in claim 1 wherein the at least one second sensor is selected from the group of sensors comprised of pressure sensitive, electrostatic, and any other sensing technology that enables detection of contact of a user on the at least one second sensor.

5. The portable electronic appliance as defined in claim 3 wherein the capacitance sensitive touchpad is capable of conforming to arcuate surfaces.

6. The portable electronic appliance as defined in claim 3 wherein the capacitance sensitive touchpad is capable of sensing touch.

7. The portable electronic appliance as defined in claim 3 wherein the capacitance sensitive touchpad is capable of proximity sensing.

8. The portable electronic appliance as defined in claim 3 wherein the at least one second sensor is comprised of a plurality of capacitance sensitive touchpads.

9. The portable electronic appliance as defined in claim 1 wherein the at least one second sensor is comprised of at least one general purpose touchpad that can sense position as well as touch or proximity of a touching object to the touchpad.

10. The portable electronic appliance as defined in claim 1 wherein the at least one second sensor is comprised of at least one single-layer touchpad that can sense touch or proximity of a touching object to the touchpad.

11. The portable electronic appliance as defined in claim 1 wherein the portable electronic appliance is further comprised of a first sensor, wherein the first sensor is capable of determining orientation of the portable electronic appliance.

12. The portable electronic appliance as defined in claim 1 wherein the functions that can be activated or deactivated using the at least one second sensor are selected from the group of functions comprised of turning on, turning off, increasing volume, decreasing volume, engaging a speakerphone mode, disengaging a speakerphone mode, toggling from a first function to a second function, and toggling from a second function back to a first function.

13. A portable electronic appliance comprising:
a portable electronic appliance having a housing,
a data entry device and a display screen;
at least one second sensor disposed underneath a surface of the housing such that a user is detected using proximity sensing capabilities of the at least one second sensor; and
wherein the at least one second sensor provides proximity sensing data to a sensor circuit disposed within the portable electronic appliance, wherein the proximity sensing data in the sensor circuit is utilized by a processor within the portable electronic appliance to determine whether or not to activate or

deactivate a predetermined function of the portable electronic appliance.

14. A method for determining where a user is touching a portable electronic appliance, said method comprising the steps of:

1) providing a housing, a data entry device and a display screen for the portable electronic appliance;

2) providing at least one second sensor disposed on a surface of the housing such that a user can make physical contact with the at least one second sensor; and

3) wherein the at least one second sensor provides contact data to a sensor circuit disposed within the portable electronic appliance, wherein the contact data in the sensor circuit is utilized by a processor within the portable electronic appliance to determine whether or not to activate or deactivate a predetermined function of the portable electronic appliance.

15. The method as defined in claim 14 wherein the step of providing the portable electronic appliance is further comprised of selecting the portable electronic

appliance from the group of portable electronic appliances comprised of a laptop computer, a mobile telephone, a personal digital assistant, a global positioning system, an electronic compass, a camera, a camcorder, and combination devices that include at least two of the functions above.

16. The method as defined in claim 14 wherein the step of providing the at least one second sensor is further comprised of providing a capacitance sensitive touchpad.

17. The method as defined in claim 14 wherein the step of providing the at least one second sensor is further comprising of selecting the at least one second sensor from the group of sensors comprised of pressure sensing, electrostatic sensing, and any other sensing technology that enables detection of contact of a user on the at least one second sensor.

18. The method as defined in claim wherein the method further comprises the step of conforming the capacitance sensitive touchpad to arcuate surfaces of the portable electronic appliance.

19. The method as defined in claim 16 wherein the method is further comprised of the step of providing a capacitance sensitive touchpad that is capable of sensing touch.

20. The method as defined in claim 16 wherein the method is further comprised of the step of providing a capacitance sensitive touchpad that is capable of proximity sensing.

21. The method as defined in claim 16 wherein the method of providing at least one second sensor is further comprised of the step of providing a plurality of capacitance sensitive touchpads.

22. The method as defined in claim 14 wherein the method of providing the at least one second sensor is further comprised of the step of providing at least one general purpose touchpad that can sense position as well as touch or proximity of a touching object to the touchpad.

23. The method as defined in claim 14 wherein the method of providing the at least one second sensor is further comprised of providing at least one single-layer touchpad that can sense touch or proximity of a touching object to the touchpad.

24. The method as defined in claim 14 wherein the method further comprises the step of providing a first sensor, wherein the first sensor is capable of determining orientation of the portable electronic appliance.

25. The method as defined in claim 14 wherein the step of providing functions that can be activated or deactivated using the at least one second sensor are selected from the group of functions comprised of turning on, turning off, increasing volume, decreasing volume, engaging a speakerphone mode, disengaging a speakerphone mode, toggling from a first function to a second function, and toggling from a second function back to a first function.